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ABSTRACT

Effectiveness in teaching and learning depends primarily on listening. Curriculum studies reveal that inclusion of listening as a subject to be taught is rare. While listening may be included as a unit within elementary or secondary classrooms, no specific instruction can be confirmed. The vast majority of America's college students can and do graduate without any listening training. Research about listening remains a minuscule portion of the research produced in the United States. Current research on listening, especially listening in the classroom, reveals a sense of idiosyncrasy: topics appear determined almost by chance. Teachers need to be trained in how to listen as well as in how to teach listening. While listening is an essential factor in classroom learning, few studies have examined that skill. In spite of the general lack of concern for classroom listening, efforts are being made to identify competencies of listening. The need and opportunity to study listening in the classroom are great. Possible research and instructional projects include: (1) demonstrate that students can be taught to listen effectively and that instruction will significantly improve instruction; (2) show that poor listening is a major cause in the exit of students prior to completing their programs; (3) prove that students who get better grades are not smarter--they listen better; (4) develop techniques and strategies for assessing student listening; (5) develop listening as a creative and critical part of thinking; and (6) clarify the role of listening in project learning or team projects. (Contains 82 references.) (RS)

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WHO'S LISTENING IN THE CLASSROOM?

A RESEARCH PARADIGM

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INTRODUCTION

Listening is pivotal in the classroom. Whether student or teacher, those who listen, learn. Those who do not, or can not, listen find the classroom frustrating. This turmoil is heightened by a popular confusion between hearing and listening. Many people believe that only deaf people can not listen -- that knowledge of, or ability, in listening can not be acquired through instruction.

Consequently, research into the classroom, learning, and communication rarely connect these three concerns with listening. Listening lacks a significant place in educational research Much of the reality of communication and learning in the classroom, if we believe the research, occurs without listening. As a result, attention to listening in the classroom -- in research or in practice -- is strictly a matter of chance. In reality, without effective listening, learning is a matter of chance.

Most teachers teach, assuming that because they are talking, their students are listening. Such an assumption obviously jeopardizes learning. This paper maintains that effectiveness in teaching and learning depends primarily on listening.

Studying the basic communication skills -- reading, writing, speaking and listening -- as essential factors in classroom learning demands specific attention to each skill. Study of any skill, especially listening, is confounded often by the attribute of *automaticity* in which the use of a skill occurs without

thought. Such obscurity causes some persons to assume that very generalized statements about a skill constitutes instruction. That assumption causes some persons to assume that simple directives such as, "pay attention," or "listen carefully," suffice as instruction. Implicit in such directives is the belief that everyone knows what to do and how to do it. A dangerous assumption. Listening, like every thinking skill, requires very specific instruction and practice.

This paper examines the status of listening in the classroom as a research topic, proposes a research paradigm for understanding what is known and not known, applies that paradigm to selected literature, and suggests possible topics and issues for future study.

CURRENT STATUS

> During the past sixty years, listening has been described variously as the *secret* skill: an orphan, obscure, invisible, lost, least understood, underdeveloped, most used and least taught, overlooked, forgotten, neglected and ignored. (Swanson, 1990)

This vague status of listening within our culture impacts on the attention paid in education. Schools and teachers face a conflict between what common sense dictates and what the popular sense of educational "reality" allows. Common sense defines education through children:

> "What children say should always be listened to with respect, if not necessarily followed. Their constant questions and requests for information deserve an answer, for that is how children acquire knowledge"

(Maniciaux, 1990, 14).

However, resistance to speaking and listening in schools persists. That resistance is heightened by "... the conflict between the rule of silence imposed by family and clan and the encouragement of speech at school...." (Maniciaux, 1991, 13). Children are to be seen, not heard. Compounding that conflict in recent years, the demands of business and industry call on schools to prepare students for the workplace. In business, listening is a critical skill. The College Board concluded, "listening is the most used and least taught skill" (1985).

Demands by business and industry must be met. Yet, the resistance of the schools to those demands (Blandin, 1992) leaves those demands unmet.

Curriculum studies reveal rare inclusion of listening as a subject to be taught. Since Paul Rankin's seminal study (1926) found that while listening is the most used skill by average adults, listening is seldom taught in school. That lack of listening instruction has changed little. Sixty years later, Wolvin and Coakley found small growth, identifying only three listening courses in the American high schools (1989). While listening may be included as a unit within other courses, such as English and speech, no specific instruction can be confirmed. Similarly, studies of listening instruction in elementary schools yield no clear information; a study of elementary textbooks (Anderson, 1988) revealed only 2.4 percent of the pages in basal readers devoted to listening. Most articles about teaching listening (see later) emphasize elementary,

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especially primary grades. While the number of colleges offering a course in listening has grown, the vast majority of America's college students can and do graduate without any listening training. These trends suggest that most students and adults struggle through school, work and daily living with only a third-grade level of listening.

This curricular shortage is reinforced by most teachers who admit freely that they have no training in listening. No studies of listening being taught within education courses can be found. A survey of classroom communication (speech for the teacher) textbooks reveal few pages devoted to listening, and even fewer pages devoted to teachers listening The sparseness of materials for training teachers confirms their recognition of a lack of listening training. Teachers are reluctant to teach what they do not know.

Testing programs reveal that same inattention to listening. Few "basic skills" testing batteries include a listening test. When the U.S. Department of Education was queried about the absence of a listening test in its basic skills battery, a representative explained that standardized listening tests "had a validity problem." While several standardized listening tests are being marketed now, critical studies persist in noting a validity problem. Concerns about that validity problem dissolve when that same problem is noted in the generally used and accepted standardized reading tests. Recently, the cost of adding a listening test to the basic skills battery was used to explain the continued

absence of listening tests.

One common complaint by teachers, trying to develop listening lessons, historically has been the lack of instructional materials on listening. In the last decade, the volume of listening materials has expanded with increasing numbers of books, activities, audiovisual materials and even computer-based materials; however, all the available materials on listening continues to lag far behind the sheer volume of materials for each of the three other communication skills.

For all the expansion in training and instructional materials, the number of students acknowledging prior listening training is few. In one case, a standardized listening test administered at Indian Creek Community College in California revealed an abrupt plunge in test scores from a mean of 61 percent between 1970 and 1979 to a mean score of 31 percent between 1987 and 1992 (Neuman, 1996). In class surveys of student listening for the past five years at Fairmont State College (West Virginia), student interviewers have concluded that only one student in five knew how to listen in the classroom. With such events, the absence of listening instruction in the classroom takes on greater significance. When colleges worry about student retention, they should about teaching those poor listeners how to improve.

Currently, research about listening remains a minuscule portion of the research produced in this country Inattention to listening research is not only a national problem; but, research worldwide reveals a

similar scarcity Without research, knowledge and understanding of listening remains limited.

In the light of an early study into academic success, continuing to ignore listening has devastating consequences for education. In 1987, J.L. Brown reported a study of the honors graduates at the University of Minnesota. Brown found that the honors graduates all declared the most important basic skill in their academic success to be listening. In comparing the results of standardized reading and listening tests taken by those honors graduates, Dr. Brown found the reading test scores for all graduates were the same, while graduates with highest honors scored higher on the listening test. When over one-half of the average class hour in American schools requires students to be listening (Wolvin & Coakley, 1995), accepting a third-grade listening level for most students anticipates academic disaster.

This paper contends that future listening research needs to be based on a need to know, not on idiosyncratic chance.

A RESEARCH PARADIGM

Current research on the topic of listening, especially listening in the classroom, reveals a sense of Idiosyncrasy; topics appear determined almost by chance. Research builds on prior research. If a factor, such as listening, has not been included in the existing body of literature, current research tends to ignore such a factor. Without a paradigm or super structure, sub-topics or

issues essential to the further development of listening in the classroom may not surface. Some work about listening appears to be redundant; however, some redundancies are applications of listening in differing subject classrooms. In the field of listening and the classroom, some critical aspects are not addressed yet.

Scanning the materials available in a selected portion of the literature on listening and the classroom, two major concerns appeared -- sources and subjects First, the sources of information must be understood. Two basic sources of information about listening in the classroom are found: academic studies and application articles. Academic studies provide information through analysis and measurement. Application articles usually identify information about listening and how that information can be applied in the classroom, following one of three tracks. Some articles focus on identifying the attributes of student listeners, describing those positive attributes of effective listeners and those negative attributes of poor listeners. Such descriptions provide teachers with a basis for recognizing whether students are listening or not. A second group of articles focus on listening as used by the teacher. These articles describe the need and attributes of a listening teacher, offering techniques or strategies to be used by a teacher listening to one or more students. Finally, a third group of articles focus on providing instructional strategies. These instructional strategies include specific lessons and units about listening as well as instructional strategies for

teaching students how to listen in other subjects.

Subjects of study or application can be divided into two groups: teachers and students. While communicative interaction in the classroom is dynamic, the action must be isolated in order to understand and to develop training. "Most teachers do not listen" is the common observation about teachers and listening (Swanson, 1987). Teacher issues involve the need for training and for developing listening as an instructional tool. Teachers need to be trained in how to listen as well as in how to teach listening. Furthermore, teachers need to understand and practice using listening as a critical instructional device.

As the second subject, students need training in how to listen. Assuming that all students know how to listen nullifies much classroom communication and learning. An early study by Ralph Nichols (1957) found that as the grade level advances from elementary to senior high, the percentage of students actually listening erodes. Instruction can take the form of courses in the curriculum, units in other subjects, and individual lessons. Problems of testing and assessment also must be considered. Finally, the requirement and demand for effective listening in school, in daily living and in the workplace must be addressed in order to provide rationale and justification for including the teaching of listening in the classroom.

TEACHERS

"Most teachers do not listen" stands as the most common observation about

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teachers and listening (Swanson, 1987). Teaching in most classrooms is the act of talking and discipline. Teachers, in the heat of daily classroom business, do not have time to listen. A major reason for teachers not listening is the lack of training.

Only one writer deals with teachers being trained to listen (Williams, 1990). Wolvin and Coakley found little evidence of teachers being trained to listen (1988). Of the listening courses taught in the nation's colleges, none have been identified as specifically teaching teachers, either in pre-service or in in-service. The assumption that listening does not require instruction prevails.

Interestingly, a few articles suggest that administrators do need to listen. Two separate articles focus on the need of principals to listen (Nelson, 1984) (Stevenson, 1989). Only one article was found focusing on the need for supervisors to listen (Taylor, 1988).

Teachers do need to listen in spite of that lack of training. Listening to students is an act of caring (Graves, 1995). When teachers listen to students' questions, student need to know is discovered (Paley, 1988). Listening in conversations with students also provides students with valuable experience in effective social interaction that is different from peer interactions (Rogers, 1988). In some subjects, the need for teacher listening is emphasized, especially in writing classes (Graves, 1995) and in medical ethics classes (Osborne & Martin, 1989). As a teaching strategy, filmstrips can be used to

reinforce student listening (Sullivan & Rogers, 1985). In chemistry classes, the challenge is posed for teachers to listen and to teach their students how to listen to chemistry (Editorial, 1988).

Finally, teachers need to listen to multicultural students in order to learn the world experienced by such students (Michael, 1984) (Wu & Kimoto, 1983).

Some writers offer teachers suggestions in how to listen to students. (Glaess, 1992) summarizes Augsburg's six steps to listening (a willingness to hear) (1982). Those six steps include: (1) a willingness to be truly present and available, (2) an openness to attend to the other's communication, (3) an interest in perceiving as another perceives, (4) a readiness to suspend judgement or evaluation, (5) a patience to wait for the other's expression, and (6) a commitment to work toward enriching dialogue. Glaess also provides additional listening skills established by Trubowitz (1975). Trubowitz proposes that teachers must (1) learn the value of silence, (2) periodically evaluate yourself as a listener by asking (a) do I listen more than I talk? (b) am I aware when I stop listening? (c) is the classroom atmosphere conducive to students sharing? (d) do I know what hinders my listening? (e) have I learned to listen for the feelings under the message? (f) do I listen as carefully, accurately, and sensitively as possible? (3) create a responsive environment, (4) use paraprofessionals to give listening time to children, (5) schedule problem solving sessions with a child, and (6) be aware of the use of informal situations to encourage children to share more freely.

A third writer, Graves, offers four tips for listening well (1995), suggesting that teachers should (1) show the children you hear what they say, (2) acknowledge points of view, (3) reduce your own speaking, and (4) slow down the curricular calendar (that creates a rush to cover materials). Finally, Adele Faber recommends four strategies to improve teacher listening effectiveness (Spann & Faber, 1993) including (1) encourage listening through play and humor, (2) ask students to help figure out solutions to problems, (3) remember to use descriptive -- not judgmental -- praise, and (4) to help kids tune in, offer choices.

At least three writers urge teachers to listen as a part of counseling (Kissen, 1993) (Feustein, 1986) (Smith, 1986).

Few writers offer teachers guidance in teaching students how to listen. McDevitt & Oreskovich (1993) suggests four lessons for teaching listening including: (1) direct the child's attention to the communicative interchange and the nature of listening, (2) suggest a strategy that the child can take to eliminate his or her confusion, (3) explain instructions to the child, and (4) intervene to solve the problem for the child or employ some other responses. Brent & Anderson (1993) offer several strategies for teaching listening including: (1) modeling good listening by valuing and practicing it, (2) providing specific instructions to predict what the students might hear, identify main ideas with supporting details, draw justifiable inferences, differentiate fact from fiction, and analyze critically, (3) watching the speaker for

information. (4) focusing to block distractions. (5) visualizing. (6) formulating questions. (7) making association. (8) predicting while listening. (9) summarizing. (10) taking notes. and (11) selecting listening strategies to match the situation. Brent & Anderson also suggest additional opportunities to increase student use of listening such as (a) the author's chair. (b) reading aloud to the class. (c) writing workshops. (d) cooperative groups. (e) reader's theatre. and (f) retelling stories.

At the middle school level. Grandgenett (1990) recommends ten ways that teachers can improve student listening. (1) Before teaching or lecturing. establish a listening environment for the learners in your classroom. (2) Pace your message so that the listener can process the information. (3) Enumerate and prioritize the important points of the message for the listener. (4) Repeat and define critical parts of the message for the listener. (5) Paint a picture of the message of the listener can visualize what is said. (6) Encourage students to keep an open mind when listening to avoid over-reacting to trigger words and phrases. (7) Recognize and reward good listening skills on a regular basis. (8) Use graphic aids such as charts and overhead transparencies to supplement lecture. (9) Evaluate students for physical or emotional problems which deter listening. (10) Summarize your lecture in a way that causes students to use several listening skills.

Gunkemeyer identifies a number of problems interfering with listening that must be solved. These problems include: distractions. inadequate vocabulary.

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individual bias, organizational structure, pseudolistening (faking), emotions, disinterest, recall, verbal and nonverbal cues, hesitancy to ask questions, laziness, and lack of training. Gunkemeyer also provides a summary of different listening assessments available.

One writer (Hobbs, 1986) identifies teacher behaviors that encourage listening.

STUDENTS

Teachers talk and students listen. That formula pervades in most American classrooms. Students spend an average of fifty percent during the average class hour supposedly using their skill of listening (Wolvin & Coakley, 1995). While listening is such an essential factor in classroom learning, few writers examine that skill. Gans (1996) presents one of the few thorough analysis of listening and the classroom. Most writers mention listening in passing, as though saying the word were sufficient to its use and success. Ironically, one early study suggested that as the grade level advanced from elementary to secondary, the percentage of students actually listening erodes (Nichols & Stevens, 1957). (Practicing teachers seeing that study agree with those percentages.) However, when the decline of classroom learning is decried, poor listening is not mentioned as a cause.

In spite of the general lack of concern for classrooom listening, efforts

are being made to identify competencies of listening. The Speech Communication Association published a list of speaking and listening competencies in 1985 (Backlund). At this time, the International Listening Association has a task force working on a list of competencies.

Standing as the basis for better listeners is Ralph Nichols' seminal study comparing good and poor listeners (1957). The ten characteristics of a good listener were contrasted with those of a poor listener serve as a key part of most listening textbooks and courses.

One strategy for teaching students to listen better took the form of a participative unit in which the students and teacher developed the subject and structure of the unit (Smith & Johnson, 1993). This unit assumes that students will learn experientially without instruction.

Interestingly, the role of listening has come to the attention of teachers in subject matters other than communication. The subjects include business education as student and employee (Gunkemeyer, 1992), vocational education (Queen, 1995), reading (Guen, 1986) (Boodt, 1984) (Levesque, 1990) (Johnson, 1992), and writing (Graves, 1995). Other subjects naturally including the study of listening include Spanish (Borges, 1987) (Fernandez, 1989) (Hendrickson, 19), and music (Sims, 1989) (Woolson, 1990).

Even science and mathematics educators are growing aware of the need for

listening. Science students are required to be effective listeners (Phibbs, 1991) (Sterling, 1983). Mathematics also requires careful student listening (Owen, 1995). Even physics teachers recognize the need for effective student listening (Kettler, 1991).

A growing number of educators are becoming aware that until students learn how to listen, they cannot listen to learn.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study clearly demonstrates that the need and the opportunity to study listening in the classroom are great. Some of the areas of needed research come from external concerns while other areas are intrinsic. Externally, listening in the classroom must prove that:

1. Students can be taught to listen effectively and that instruction will significantly improve learning.
2. Testing and test scores are a valued part of the educational picture (report card).
3. Trained student listeners will become more effective employees.
4. Listening instruction has a place in schools beyond the third-grade level.
5. Poor listening is a major cause in the exit of students prior to completing their programs.
6. Continuing to use the 3-R's as the only basic skills fails to deal

with the reality of education in the twenty-first century.

7. Any skill cannot be taught once with finality.

8. Prove students who get better grades are not smarter: they listen better.

9. Establish a list of criteria defining "grade levels" of listening (similar to reported reading grade levels).

10. How many teachers have been taught about listening?

Among the internal issues or concerns necessary to teaching listening are:

1. A list of specific, trainable factors in listening must be established.
2. Develop techniques and strategies for assessing student listening.
3. Develop computer-based, interactive listening materials.
4. Identify listener abilities required in processing nonverbal dimensions of a message.
5. Develop listening as a creative and critical part of thinking.
6. What works in teaching students to listen?
7. Develop a wider range of listening audio/visual materials.
8. Support and refine the language arts/whole language programs.
9. Clarify the role of listening in "interactive learning."
10. Clarify the role of listening in project learning or team projects.
11. How can teachers be taught to listen?

The above lists reveal only some possible research and instructional projects possible within the area of listening in the classroom.

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